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ABSTRACT

This essay captures elements of the accumulated experiences of different teachers' centers and presents possible alternatives for efforts to establish new centers. Characteristics of a "typical" teachers' center are presented, according to origin, setting, facilities, program, governance, participation, and staff. Common differences between teachers' center programs and conventional school district/university inservice programs are noted, as well as the differences between teachers' centers and curriculum resource/media centers. The value of centers to teachers are expressed in terms of warmth, concreteness, and connection, opportunity for time and thought, and ingredients for successful innovation. The implied challenge contained in the Teacher Center Law for collaboration between centers and local school administration is examined. Bureaucratic concerns (governance, incentives, needs assessment, scale, pace) and nonbureaucratic concerns (leadership, teacher contributions, equality of participant status, informal assessment) are discussed. (MJB)

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The National Institute of Education
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*by* KATHLEEN DEVANEY

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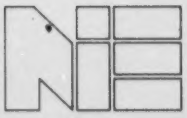

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## *PREFACE*

*For several years a number of us who are now with NIE's School Capacity for Problem Solving Group have been following the emergence and evolution of a new form of professional development for teachers -- the teachers' center. We have visited centers, talked with center leaders, and observed teachers engaged in a variety of self-development activities. We have provided modest financial support for the Teachers' Centers Exchange to help centers assist and collaborate with each other, enrich their programs, and extend information and technical assistance to educators initiating centers. Recently, we initiated a program of research to explore centers' activities and effects, and to project ways to increase their contribution to the process of school improvement.*

*We are not now -- and may never be -- at a stage in these explorations which could permit us to say flatly that "research indicates teachers' centers work." Frankly, we doubt there is any single solution to the many needs and problems which should be addressed through inservice education. Further, we do not believe that efforts to improve education can always wait until clear research evidence appears.*

*Nevertheless, the teachers' center idea is stirring increasing interest among people concerned about school improvement, at the federal and state as well as the local level. Legislation to support a national program of teachers' centers was passed in the last Congress. It is likely that in the next year or so 8.5 million dollars will be made available to local school districts and colleges of education through the U.S. Office of Education for the operation of centers.*

*Thus, we feel that this is a particularly opportune time to communicate our sense of the promise of teachers' centers and to share some of the experience of the established centers. While we cannot claim to know precisely how new centers should be structured and how they should operate, we do think that people starting centers are more likely to succeed if they take account of existing experience.*

*The following essay by Kathleen Devaney of the Teachers' Centers Exchange captures elements of the accumulated experience of different centers, and draws implications for efforts to establish new centers. The essay represents a particular point of view about the purposes of teachers' centers, about teachers' ideas and responsibilities, and about the weaknesses of many inservice approaches. It is a view derived from five years of experience in observing, documenting, and facilitating the work of centers across the country. We feel that readers will find the analysis thoughtful and provocative regardless of their own point of view.*

*Mary Hanahan, Marc Tucker*
**School Capacity for Problem Solving Group**
**National Institute of Education**

When the Congress enacted and the President signed the Education Amendment of 1976 (Public Law 94-482) last fall, they authorized as much as $68 million a year for three years for "teachers centers," which they defined as local school-district sponsored "sites" where working teachers could pursue professional improvement directly related to their own classrooms, and where the improvement program would be overseen by a "policy board" composed of teachers in the majority, with a little help from administrators, professors, and the school board.

By the fall of 1977 the intent and potential of this legislation will have been spelled out, first in terms of the dollars Congress actually appropriates and then in terms of the program the U. S. Office of Education designs. During this official definition process, it seems important to trace origins and identify colloquial meanings attached to the term teachers center, lest its root, sense, and feeling be uncomprehended in the clamor for federal funds.

Over the past ten years a nationwide group of American educators has developed the idea of a small, informal sometimes independent, sometimes district or university-sponsored *work place* where elementary teachers come, on their own initiative, to work on curriculum for their own classrooms. They work with the help of practical-minded professors or master teachers and with each other, largely in the spirit of colleagues exchanging rather than experts training.

About 100 entities across the country loosely fit this definition. I dub them "teachers' centers," emphasizing the possessive in order to connote largely voluntary (though often on school-district released time) self-programming by teachers as they seek what they need and share what they do well. In the following pages I will detail some of the origins, aspects and attributes of teachers' centers which, in the minds of those who run them and the teachers who use them, set these centers apart from —— and make them better than—— conventional inservice programs. Then I will touch on challenges that the federal program presents to the grassroots-evolved teachers' centers. Finally, I will suggest some problems and principles derived from teachers' centers' experience that may be instructive for persons concerned with the design of program and policy for new teachers centers to be funded by the Federal government.

## What Goes on in a Teachers' Center

But first, what does a teachers' center look like? What goes on there? A typical teachers' center does not exist, because each center embodies unique resources, and attempts to fulfill unique needs. Some centers serve whole school districts, a few serve several districts, others just one school zone or one building. Some centers charge fees or sell memberships, some have federal categorical funding, many are built at least partially into school district budgets. Some centers are general in subject matter focus, some concentrate on a single subject such as math. Some are characterized less by their place than by their staff —— advisors or resource teachers who work in a nonsupervisory style at a teacher's request to enrich classroom curriculum or instructional repertoire. A composite center might be sketched as follows:

**Origin**: Started in 1970 in a subdistrict of a big city in its first year of desegregation to help teachers in ten elementary schools revise and invent curriculum appropriate for minority group children.

**Setting**: Several classrooms of an old school closed as a fire trap.

**Facilities**: Workroom for teachers to copy individualized lesson cards and learning games from displays of curriculum ideas that have worked for other teachers; carpentry shop where teachers learn to make their own math

and science "concrete-manipulative" materials, and to construct wood or triwall cardboard bookshelves, cubbies, workbenches for children in informal classrooms; plants and small animals in habitats to take into the classroom; darkroom for developing teachers' and children's photographs; potter's wheel, clay, and kiln; kitchen and lounge, furnished with hand-me-downs, for teachers' informal talk, organized discussions or seminars, and counseling with staff; library of adults' and children's books, curriculum materials; and storeroom of industrial scrounge materials, selected by an educator for their potential educational uses.

**Program**: Workshops presenting science, math, crafts, cooking, reading, social studies, art, music, drama and other elementary curriculum in a style that maximizes active, hands-on-participation by teachers; allows them to learn new concepts at their own, adult level; and to experience again how it feels to tackle new learning. (African and Mexican cultural patterns, arts, and artifacts are emphasized in many of these workshops, and teachers make materials to take to their own classrooms.) Seminars initiated by teachers on classroom management; on ways that children's thinking differs from that of adults.

**Staff**: Two full-time and three part-time master teachers. One full-time and one part-time secretary. Occasional consultants (including teachers acting as workshop instructors). Director is a former professor of early childhood education involved in "active-learning, discovery" curriculum development projects. Besides teaching workshops and providing informal counseling in the center, staff work as "advisors" in classrooms of participants who ask them to assist. They make repeated visits over an extended period and give critical but non-official evaluation of the teacher's work in a troublesome subject area or with particular children. Advisors "model" a different way to teach difficult kids; suggest more appropriate or varied curriculum materials; help rearrange the classroom -- all the while providing constructive criticism about a teacher's felt inadequacy, which the teacher can accept because it comes from a trusted co-worker, not an evaluative supervisor.

**Decision Making**: Advisory board of teachers, one from each building served, helps voice teachers' needs to the center's staff. The board suggests programs, and recruits teachers to the center. A member of the advisory board wrote her first impression: "My God! Teachers actually in charge!" and her analysis of the board's duties: "To explore our roles as teachers, to take responsibility for improving the quality of teaching, to raise the consciousness of the staff of the schools..."

**Participation**: Free and voluntary. Teachers come after school and on Saturdays on their own time, as well as during minimum days. Courses for credit -- such as a semester seminar on Piaget psychology -- carry a fee. About half the elementary teachers in the school zone use the center several times a year and rally to support it before the board of education every year at budget time. Work in the center is accepted for salary advancement credit. The staff energetically promotes use of the center by principals with whole faculties, curriculum task forces, Title program staff trainers.

**Finance**: Established with foundation funds which have now expired, the center is "institutionalized" but always vulnerable to budget cuts. Up to now the center has been rescued by parents' and teachers' politicking. There have never been funds for an objective evaluation of the center's effects on teachers.

**How a Teachers' Center is Different from Inservice and Extension**

No single description will fit even two centers, but all centers share elements in common, and all differ from conventional school district or university inservice and from familiar notions of curriculum resource/media centers. In the words of several directors of teachers' centers:

> We provide continuity of space and time, and a staff available to a teacher to work on an individualized problem, either in the teacher's school or in a separate place.

> The grad courses at the university are geared to advancing the teacher out of the classroom -- becoming a reading specialist or "learning disabilities" specialist, or some sort of administrator. Teachers' centers are dedicated to helping teachers stay in the classroom and experience their work as important, stimulating, less fragmented, and less isolated. Instead of emphasizing specialties and separateness we try to nurture a whole approach toward teaching and help teachers collaborate with each other.

> We try to design a learning program for teachers that is non-threatening, responsive, supportive but yet identifies major areas of concentration for the learning of the children in those teachers' classrooms. Without such concentration inservice is trivial: a few days a year; tips to brighten your classroom; fifty tricky treats to make on Halloween for all ethnic groups. It is unfortunate that in this country the problems in children's learning are not valued as matters for sustained adult effort, but are defined as matters requiring a quick delivery of "skills." A professional has to be able to identify with a serious, sustained endeavor. A teachers' center defines the study of children's learning as a serious, professional endeavor.

Tomes have been written about inservice education, but one rarely finds in them emphasis on the necessity for teachers to study children's learning. Far from endeavoring to uplift the scholarly or professional quality of teachers' work, most inservice reform claims to make teaching a more precise technology for "delivering skills" to students. At the peril of treating teachers like interchangeable functionaries on assembly lines, "training systems" try to "renew" teachers by delivering to them bundles of skills or modules of training, in the manner in which teachers are to deliver skills to students. It is odd that teachers' work should be cast in terms that seem more appropriate to salesmen or teamsters. Yet the delivery system metaphor for teachers' continuing education pervades educational journals, dialogue, and policy formulations. Perhaps this is a measure of the still ambiguous status of public school teaching in America -- somewhere between a skilled trade and a profession.

In this state of affairs, leaders of teachers' centers -- who are convinced of the seriousness and complexity of the teachers' job -- have come to view teachers' center participants as careerists in search of a profession. Public school teaching today can inspire, if not demand, a professional rather than merely technical bent of mind and level of performance -- at least in those American schools which manage to avoid or survive the twin mind destroyers, violence and ennui. But the college preparation of the average teacher has not induced the depth of thought, the sureness of touch, the smooth mesh of theory with technique that are associated with professionalism. And the on-the-job learning undergone by that average teacher is inconsistent: in some ways, places, and times, the job is challengingly responsible, in others demeaningly menial. Nor do the external rewards of salary raises and promotions place priority on intellectual qualities or inventiveness. Nevertheless, teachers who persist in the job and seek inner rewards from their work increasingly desire professionalism as well as the knowledge of serving. For them, training systems, however efficient and

necessary for implementing broad scale, minimum level performance by whole staffs, are not personal enough, and college programs are not practical enough, to nourish growth. Teachers' centers come into existence to advocate and provide for professional growth based on the personality of the teacher and the reality of the classroom. Their programs are modest, pragmatic, sometimes makeshift, but nonetheless serious.

Teachers who talk about the value of a teachers' center express a need to "come in out of the cold" — the isolation, frustration, fear of supervisors' or co-workers' censure, and their own more chilling perception of failing to teach kids. They crave warmth. Teachers using teachers' centers say they need more local, practical, and profound lessons to use in the classroom, lessons connected to students' lives (not just future jobs); they demand concreteness and connection. And teachers in teachers' centers aspire to a self-aware, self-correcting, self-reflective kind of teaching: they need time for thought.

*Warmth*

> There is a feeling of warmth here, a feeling of companionship, of play. What teachers' centers have going for them is that there's no failure really. It's not a win-lose kind of environment.

Laymen dismiss or misread teachers' expressions of discouragement, stress, even anger, because we don't perceive that a major source of such feelings lies in the structure of the job itself. The American teacher's role was fashioned during the past hundred years to fit a work place in which students in one class stood at reasonably equal levels of achievement and had mastered one consistent style of learning, so that the teacher up front at the blackboard could "deliver" one prepackaged textbook lesson to the whole class. In the past 20 years, laws and coincident developments in American social institutions — home, church, mass media, business — have drastically changed society's demands upon the schools and thus have radically changed many public schools as work places. The teacher role which most laymen are familiar with from their own schooling is functional now only in those classes which are able to preserve or return to "homogeneous grouping." In those schools where such instruction is not possible, teachers may feel unsupported and ill-equipped to do the job society expects. Daily stress may make them inept, defensive, drained. In such conditions, teachers' centers set their first priority as reducing failure and infusing psychic and intellectual energy.

> It's a place you come to bounce ideas off people who are here. They're doing the same thing with you. You came kind of taking but all of a sudden you are giving. That has got to be one of the most important things going as far as teachers are concerned.

*Concreteness and Connection*

In their ongoing emphasis on "concrete" curriculum materials, teachers' centers hark back to the voices in the curriculum development movement of the '60s who called for hands-on, "real-life," lesson material with which to teach the 3 R's, science, and social studies. These materials, easily adaptable to students of differing achievement levels, could be used with heterogeneous as well as homogeneous groups of students. Many teachers' centers are led by first- or second-generation leaders of those curriculum projects. These people still concentrate on inventing or adapting curriculum materials with teachers, and helping teachers make use of the potent learning experiences in nature, homes, and communities. In the teachers' centers' perspective, the curriculum development task is never-ending and must be teacher-involving, especially where there are schools operating under social mandates for desegregation, "mainstreaming" mentally retarded into regular classrooms, or other forms of mixed-ability grouping. Such mandates create a multiplicity of learning background and styles among students, which in turn demand that a teacher continually collect, adapt, or concoct new curriculum materials to fit particular children and to help children understand and value each other. Curriculum development for such classrooms must go hand in hand with inservice, and neither can properly be conceived only in terms of rejuvenative shots from experts.

It would be silly to maintain that all teachers are eager, self-renewing students of their profession and practiced inventors of custom-made curriculum. But the vast lot of teachers want to do their job better, and they understand that a successful lesson is not simply an expert's packet of subject matter, but a blend of subject matter, the student's learning status and style, and the teacher's teaching style. Teachers' centers show that it is not visionary to expect ordinary teachers to work hard and voluntarily, provided they can get help in revamping their own curriculum.

The basic stock in trade in many teachers' centers is a "make-it-and-take-it" workshop: teachers construct in the center some new child-appealing lesson and take it back to their classrooms.

> A make-and-take-workshop can be gimmicky, but it also can be real. And it's a start for teachers who have never had a hand in their own curriculum. Going along with the making, there needs to be a lot of critical discussion, but in the context of something that's real to teachers. Curriculum materials are a way of communicating with kids, and so also of communicating with teachers.

Communicating over curriculum — literally choosing, adapting, or developing materials — is a way of "diagnosing" what teachers need. It is more accurate than a generalized "needs assessment" instrument.

> People who design inservice have to do more than run a "needs analysis." If a teacher seeks a new resource, the teacher-of-teachers has to observe what level the teacher is seeking to develop: awareness or competence? I observe that experienced teachers are saturated on the awareness level. There is a constant flooding of teachers with workshops plugging neat ideas and neat activities. What's lacking is the context for that activity, the connection of that teaching-learning act to the teacher's real world. Making that connection requires work ing with teachers at a level deeper than surface activity....
>
> When a teacher has a question or a problem and has formulated it, then there's a place for outside information and ideas. Until then she's inundated with information she can't hook up with anything she's familiar with. One instance or episode is not a problem. Part of the professionalization has to be teachers clarifying for themselves what the problem is.

*Time and Thought*

Flooding teachers with information is the flaw in a curriculum materials resource center which is no more than a storehouse of the "validated products" from which teachers can select new goodies. What teachers need is supportive, constructively critical help in importing new ideas to their own classrooms. This almost always involves some adaptation or even substantial reinvention of the curriculum materials. "Innovation" and "individualization" take time to rethink the students' needs, the subject-matter content, and the teacher's capability.

> If I am, in fact, going to select appropriate pieces of curriculum to fit my own students, my basic need is to have a variety of resource people whose practical experience I can respect, and the ability to use one of those people not in a one-shot workship but over time, in as much depth as I am ready for. It takes more than two days or a weekend or a month to put together curriculum. You have to use resources, reflect upon what happens then with kids, and go back and revamp what you're doing.

> Teachers' centers -- or any staff development -- must eventually take teachers to a state of development where they see the teaching act itself as a source of knowledge. After a teacher has done these 472 activities, how does she abstract the key to them so she can create or adapt her own activities? If she doesn't get a theory she has to have 472 new activities. If you're going to be a teaching professional you have to learn to extend, modify, reconstruct, and create your own activities.

*Ingredients of Successful Innovations*

Teachers' centers' experience over the past five to seven years has been so varied that it cannot be said to constitute a full-fledged model for a new form of inservice. Not all centers have been able to step beyond the stage of offering warmth and concreteness. In no case has funding been sufficient or sustained enough to mount a thoroughgoing evaluation of the effects on teachers of a program combining warmth, concreteness, and thoughtfulness over time. Very few centers have had substantial experience with secondary teachers. The compelling evidence about teachers' centers thus is not where they have gotten to -- hard data about effects on teachers; but rather where they are coming from -- the opposite direction from conventional inservice, which teachers deride even under its new moniker of "staff development."

> "Staff development!" That's a dirty word. If it weren't mandated we wouldn't do it, and when they pull the funding it's gonna go.

Why does it so often happen that "when they pull the funding" the imported innovation disappears? Because teachers can't learn or don't care? The Rand Corporation says no. Looking at the difference between federal change agent projects that have disappeared and those that have lasted, Rand investigators found common ingredients of successful projects that seem very close to the ingredients of teachers' centers. The successful change projects incorporated a stance of support for teachers that lowered their defensiveness against change. The successful projects emphasized local invention rather than implementation of "validated products" or "planned interventions." From "day one," these projects were planned with teachers as collaborators rather than targets. Highly committed, energetic, local leaders were involved rather than outside experts. The successful innovations

were not simple, but complex and demanding and possessed intellectual-philosophical coherence.[1]

The one ingredient of the successful change agent projects which Rand stipulates but which many teachers' centers do not yet exemplify is "critical mass"-- a sufficient body of participants to make an impact on a school district and gain momentum. Gaining participants sufficient to constitute critical mass is a basic goal for most experience teachers' centers now, even though it is extremely difficult to serve greater numbers when budget cuts have depleted center staffs. Thus they look with hope to the new federal teacher center legislation.

[1] Paul Berman and Milbrey Wallin McLaughlin, *Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change, Vol. IV: The Findings in Review*, R-1589/4-HEW (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, April 1975).

If the legislation is an opportunity for teachers' centers, it is prerequisitely a challenge to them to collaborate with local school administrations.

> The major issue is: how can the teacher-involving, teacher-supporting, teacher-stretching centers relate to the local education agency and yet keep their integrity? A teachers' center staff that's outside the district can build up a high trust level with teachers, but the staff's influence within the system is the crux of how well most teachers can perform back in the classroom. The teachers' center has to be more than a place to come and get turned on by innovative materials. It must have some mechanisms for reaching the structure and the policies of the school system.

Collaboration with the school district means devising decision-making structures which are mutual but which preserve the program's independence and thus the credibility of the teachers' center staff with rank-and-file teachers. Joint policy making and the search for stronger incentives for teachers to participate will entail initiating or strengthening relationships with principals and other supervisory and planning staff in the district, and encouraging them to use the center as a resource for district-sponsored improvement projects. However, such collaboration cannot be at the risk of destroying the center's status as a place where it's safe for teachers to admit inadequacy and to experiment without fear of being evaluated.

Greater than the opportunity the law offers to a relatively small number of experienced teachers' centers who represent an alternative to conventional in-service, is the challenge the law presents to inservice educators in school districts and colleges of education and to teacher associations determined to direct their members' inservice. Can they, as the law seems to allow and intend, rethink conventional inservice formats, program substance, needs assessment, incentives to teachers, and administration of program?

*Teacher-Dominated Boards*

The law's provision for teachers to be in the majority on a center's supervisory board appears to constitute a requirement that the teacher center should be independent from the line organization of the school district. However, something more is needed than a majority of properly representative and properly designated teachers acting independently. They must act wisely. What is

learned in a teachers' center — as distinguished from what is taught — is largely controlled by what the participant teachers bring to the center. They bring their own time, ingenuity, perserverance; their teaching successes to build on and share; their willingness to risk learning something new and to pinpoint areas for individual improvement. Teachers who evidence previous investment of this kind in their own professional growth or local curriculum development are needed on the supervisory board, as well as in the group that initiates the funding proposal and plans the center program. Only that depth of experience can both generate an innovative program and verify its relevance to co-workers. And putting the teachers in charge of the center program will not greatly help if all the other curriculum and instruction aspects of the school system remain outside the center's influence.

*Incentives*

Guaranteeing the new program's appeal is another policy matter. The clear intent of the law is to spur greatly increased numbers of teachers to renew their education. Yet this must be done without coercing and thus squelching the self-motivated. Teachers' center experience attests that teachers will volunteer for new study and extra work if they are convinced that these will improve their ability to reach their own students with a solid lesson, and if they feel that they are not working alone. Teachers' intrinsic aspirations for collegiality and professionalism are hidden resources that can be tapped. Yet, almost every discussion of teachers' centers as a model for federally supported inservice evokes a challenge as to what a center can do about "all those others": rank-and-file teachers whom the challenger characterizes as unwilling to improve.

Several incentives to such teachers need to materialize during the process of applying for and setting up a new teacher center: the central administration's clear message of priority for a new kind of inservice; teachers' obvious participation in program design; supervisory evaluators' deliberate separation from the learning process in the center.

Another elementary step to increase teachers' participation in a center without mandating it is to grant salary increment credits for center-based workshop series, supervised independent study in the center, participaction in curriculum task forces, etc. Some states and school districts are examining their present schedules for granting salary increments (and some have changed credential renewal requirements) so as to reward only those courses and activities directly related to current or anticipated job responsibilities involving students, and to reward longevity only if it's accompanied by proof of continuing professional study.

The incentive that most observers believe is stronger than salary advancement credit — especially in districts where many teachers are already high on the scale — is the provision for participation in the center during the school day. Study on released time can be targeted to the teacher's job, can take place at a time of day when teachers are not exhausted from teaching, and can provide a morale-lifting change of pace and pooling of group energy on a mutual problem. Now that local school district policy making is in flux, through diminishing funds, changing teacher roles, and new educational goals demanding fresh thinking and new rules making, it may be propitious to structure the new federal teacher center program so as to stimulate states and school districts to support teachers' work in the teacher center during school time.

*Needs Assessment*

Another policy matter implicit in the federal teacher center law is deciding what the center should teach: the curriculum in the center must be worthy

of the tax dollars invested in it. What do teachers need to learn in order to provide what kids need to learn? By and large, teachers' centers people believe it is simple to discover teachers' needs — but it takes time and close acquaintance. Most teachers know where they are inadequate and would acknowledge it and ask for assistance, if they were able to get help in a setting in which it was safe to admit weakness, in which the teacher was not prematurely evaluated, and in which time was not wasted on trivia. Comprehensive, technologically sophisticated needs assessment questionnaires seldom turn up new topics that could not be generated just as well by principals, resource teachers and consultants, teacher advisory groups, and by center staff's sensitivity to their participants and to which programs succeed and which flop. The essence of the teachers' center's alternative style and setting for teachers' learning is in convincing the learner of his potential and responsibility for growth. Thus center leaders keep eyes open for what teachers can do, and how that can be built upon to strengthen points of inadequacy.

The crucial element is not a diagnosis of deficiencies, for we have been identifying those for years and producing barrels of curriculum remedies which have not "taken." What is crucial in teachers' learning is conviction of capacity, possibility.

> The key to opening people to change is attitude, not information and skills. I can distill into ten pages what I think a teacher needs [in order] to teach reading. But before that, teacher must get a set of basic attitudes — how language is viewed, how reading is viewed. Attitudes are the crucial foundation that makes it possible to assimilate new skills. This is a Piagetian process, gradually developing. And the worst thing that can happen in this process is for teachers to be put in the position of defending what they are doing against your new ideas. They must have time to come around to a new view.

*Scale and Pace*

Teachers' centers began slowly and on a small scale to experiment with a new mode for teachers' learning. But they had more than a new style; also a new strategy. They focused on the "reachable" — teachers who felt a sense of potential and who reached for change — and used their first successes to energize slower-to-kindle colleagues. If the first generation of teachers' center leaders could offer only one piece of advice to others starting new centers now, it would be: Begin right away, even on a limited basis, to be the change you want to make.

> You can't legislate it, you can't force it, you have to work toward it. I'm more inclined to the snowball than the avalanche.

**Non-Bureaucratic Specifications and Objectives**

A "snowball strategy" implies non-bureaucratic specifications for the organization of a teachers' center.

1. Flexible and fast in response to teachers' daily requests, the center must be non-hierarchical in staff organization. The leadership which designs the program must be in day-to-day communication with individual rank-and-file teachers. Staff must be advisors, scouts for talent among teachers, brokers, and improvisers as well as instructors. A staff working so improvisationally should be in close communication with each other: thus a small group — six to eight workshop instructors and advisors at maximum — may be more than a fiscal virtue; it may be a programmatic necessity. Limited size of staff, plus teachers' expectation of staff members' continuing, personalized assistance over an extended time, mean that the center may not be able to fulfill all the professional development needs of a large constituency of teachers. If it's comprehensive in program, then the center can serve only a limited constituency.

2. Defining its program offerings in terms of what participants give as well as what they take, the teachers' center must seek resources besides money. These include teachers' freely given time as well as district-paid released time; their volunteered advice and examples to fellow teachers as well as payment when they teach workshops.

3. Since the school district controls so many of the forces determining whether the teacher can apply what's learned in the center, teachers ought to be able to make common cause in a center with principals, curriculum supervisors, evaluators, parents. Therefore, eligibility for using the center should be broadly defined, and once there, participants' status should be equal.

4. If the center's purpose is to stimulate and support professional growth that stems from objective and earnest reflection about self-improvement, it has to set an example of thoughtful, careful growth. It can't spring full-fledged from the planners' agendas, and mature in a year. Assessment of its effectiveness will have to be in terms of verifying individual teachers' improvement in classroom performance over time, not simply counting contact hours nor attempting to connect students' achievement test scores with teachers' participation in the center.

If a new inservice program were to apply the teachers' center strategy, organization, and pedagogical style with some critical but not overwhelming mass of teachers, it could reasonably expect to make good on at least two of the following objectives:

1. Energize teachers to invest themselves in new ideas and effort in return for receiving non-judgmental, practical but thought-provoking help, including colleagues' encouragement and exchanges.

2. Gain teachers' involvement in tailoring curriculum for their own classroom and students, using an expansive, beyond-the-classroom-walls definition of what are appropriate learning materials and experiences. Help teachers tie informal, student-appealing learning episodes to formal concepts and skills, so that students' experience of the wider community and natural environment as part of schoolwork are at a thinking level deeper than show-and-tell.

3. Refresh and sustain teachers with a new and constructive "staff developer," called an advisor: a master teacher whom the teacher invites into the classroom, not to supervise or evaluate or implement a particular program but over a period of time to problem-solve, bring new ideas, demonstrate an alternative teaching style, provoke and extend the teachers' thought.

4. Transcend role boundaries so that principals and supervisors and parents plan for instructional improvement along with teachers in a nonjudgmental collaborative environment.

These seem realizable goals in the light of the teachers' center experience I have sketched — given good luck in leadership and timing, good will among all parties, and the financial blessings of the federal teacher center law.

Nevertheless, we cannot be at all sure that the new law and the centers it supports will actually change the substance of inservice for the teachers who participate in them. Easier than changing substance will be amalgamating, articulating and sophisticating (and re-staffing and re-naming) the "delivery system" for inservice, and thereby greatly increasing numbers of teacher exposures to inservice lessons. It will be difficult, unpredictable, and time consuming — though not necessarily more expensive — to instill learning that is assimilated and activated in the teacher's classroom. The history of other grassroots innovations that, like teachers' centers, have been translated into federal policy, suggests that substantive change — "assimilable," "actionable" inservice — will be hard to come by unless the initiators of the new teachers centers set themselves a task that is more fundamental than designing a new delivery system. That task will be to invent an *ignition system,* and there to blend warmth, concreteness, time, and thought that spark teachers' learning.

If you are interested in learning more about the activities of many of the country's experienced teachers' centers, we invite you to get in touch with Kathleen Devaney or her co-workers at the Teachers' Center Exchange at the address below. They will try to answer your questions and put you in touch with centers in your area -- whether you define that in terms of subject matter, geographic region, constituency, or point of view.

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